

UC Merced Free Speech Week

February 22-26, 2021



Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
2019-2020 VOICE Awardee Report





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Report Introduction

UC Merced's inaugural Free Speech Week revolved around the theme "Can Speech Truly Be Free?" and took place on February 22-26, 2021. Free Speech Week was possible due to funding provided by the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement and consisted of a series of virtual interactive Zoom sessions that covered various topics associated with free speech and hate speech (e.g., the historical contexts, tensions between hate speech and free speech on college campuses and online, and practical tips for balancing free speech and inclusion in everyday life). Importantly, we designed Free Speech Week to help empower our UC Merced campus community—as we champion dialogues that matter—by facilitating a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding freedom of expression and equity, diversity, and inclusion within and beyond higher education.

This report provides a summary of the various events that constituted Free Speech Week and highlights select feedback quotes before concluding with final thoughts and reflections. More details about UC Merced's inaugural Free Speech Week, including available recordings of the virtual sessions, can be found on our event website <https://diversity.ucmerced.edu/events/free-speech-week>. Questions about anything included in this report can be emailed to diversity@ucmerced.edu.



Free Speech Week Virtual Zoom Sessions

Monday, February 22nd
4:00- 5:00 pm PST

Free Speech & Hate Speech



Speaker:

Dr. Jennifer Lambe

*Associate Professor, Department of Communication,
University of Delaware 2020-2021 Fellow of the
University of California Center for Free Speech and
Civic Engagement*

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23RD

CAN SPEECH TRULY BE FREE? WHO CAN SAY WHAT WHEN?

TIME: Noon - 1:30 PM PST



Keynote Speaker:

Dr. Lori S. White
President
DePauw University



Moderator:

Dania Matos, J.D. (she/her/ella)
Associate Chancellor & Chief Diversity Officer
University of California, Merced

Wednesday, February 24th
1:00- 2:00 pm PST

Navigating Issues of Free Speech and Academic Freedom within Academia



Speakers:

Jonathan Grady, PhD
Associate Vice Chancellor & Dean of Students



Chris Kello, PhD
*Interim Vice Provost & Graduate Dean
Professor of Cognitive & Information Sciences*

Wednesday, February 24th
4:30- 6:00 pm PST

Free Speech is a Human Right



Speaker:

Nicholas Perez
*Manager for Free Expression and Education
PEN America*

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25TH

HOW HIGHER EDUCATION HAS FAILED TO TEACH CRITICAL THINKING IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

TIME: 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM PST



Speaker:

Gregg Camfield
Executive Vice Chancellor & Provost, and
Professor, School of Social Sciences,
Humanities and Arts

Thursday, February 25th
1:00- 2:15 pm PST

Free Speech in Everyday Life



Speaker:

Jonathan Friedman
*Director, Free Expression and Education
PEN America*

Thursday, February 25th
5:30- 7:00 pm PST

Using Our Voices Together: Collaborations Between Students and Administrators to Address Campus Speech Challenges



Speakers:

Le'Trice Curl
*Associate Dean of Students, Office of Student Rights and
Responsibilities*



Kamyar Nekoui
*UC Merced Alumnus ('20) and UC Hastings J.D.
Candidate ('23)*



Melissa Barthelemy
*PhD Candidate, UC Santa Barbara and 2019-2020 Free
Speech Fellow*



Jason Braun
*Student Intern for the Office of the Dean of Students and
Associate Vice Chancellor, Director of the UC Merced Law Clinic*



Moderator:

Michelle Deutchman
*Executive Director of the UC National Center for Free Speech and
Civic Engagement*

344 Total
Registered
Attendees



ZOOM EVENTS OVERVIEW

7

12

135*

12*

Events

Speakers

Registered
Faculty & Staff

Registered
Students

FEBRUARY

INDIVIDUAL EVENT REGISTRATION

22nd

FREE SPEECH & HATE SPEECH

65

23rd

CAN SPEECH TRULY BE FREE?
WHO CAN SAY WHAT WHEN?

62

24th

NAVIGATING ISSUES OF FREE SPEECH &
ACADEMIC FREEDOM WITHIN ACADEMIA

45

FREE SPEECH IS A HUMAN RIGHT

38

25th

HOW HIGHER EDUCATION HAS FAILED TO
TEACH CRITICAL THINKING IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

56

FREE SPEECH IN EVERYDAY LIFE

38

USING OUR VOICES TOGETHER: COLLABORATIONS
BETWEEN STUDENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS TO
ADDRESS CAMPUS SPEECH CHALLENGES

40

*Many people registered for more than one event; however, this number represents the total number of unique registrants within these categories.



Select Zoom Session Feedback Quotes

"I really like when President White talked about all the setups a university can take when there is a controversial speaker invited to campus by a student group. I think it is very important for university leadership to speak to those students to know their understanding of the controversy of their guest and to reiterate the potential repercussions. It also speaks a lot to the values of a university if they are willing to help with counter-programming and checking in with their students who could potentially be harmed by the invited speaker. And the last thing I am taking with me is to try to be willing to hear someone even if they have differing opinions than me and to not automatically dismiss them. Every experience is a learning experience for everyone if you choose to let it be one."

UC Merced Staff Member

(Keynote: Can
Speech Truly Be
Free? Who Can Say
What When?)

UC Merced Undergraduate Student (Navigating Issues of Free Speech & Academic Freedom Within Academia)

"The most valuable thing I learned was the many ways to prepare in using free speech with those who support your message and those who do not."

"I appreciated the main argument in the talk, as I've been one to blame the failing democratic discourse and institutions to a perceived general "lack of education" in this country. I didn't know that statistics show otherwise and shifting the focus to failure of teaching critical thinking instead is an important call to action."

UC Merced Faculty Member (How Higher Education Has Failed to Teach Critical Thinking in Public Discourse)



UC Merced's Free Speech Website

UC Merced's inaugural Free Speech Week culminated with the launch of the [UC Merced Free Speech website](#) which was developed in collaboration with members of the Office of Legal Affairs. This website contains a variety of helpful resources and information associated with the topic of free speech on campus including an FAQ section, relevant policies, and system-wide resources. We highly encourage everyone to explore this website at their leisure.



UC Merced Free Speech

[Home](#) [Learn](#) [Act](#) [Resources](#) [FAQs](#) [Free Speech Week](#)



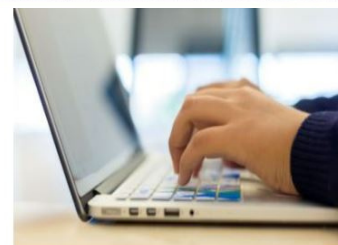
[Learn](#)

UC Merced is committed to assuring that all persons may exercise their constitutionally protected rights of free expression, speech, and assembly.



[Act](#)

The First Amendment gives us all a great deal of power by allowing us to express ourselves freely, with limited restrictions, and to disagree with the speech and actions of others.



[Get Resources](#)

UC Merced offers many resources and services to help students, faculty and staff understand their rights and to cope with the discomfort that the free and open exchange of ideas can bring.



Free Speech Week Reflections and Concluding Thoughts

Free Speech Week was developed with the intention of empowering our campus community and facilitating a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding freedom of expression and equity, diversity, and inclusion within and beyond UC Merced. However, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged as the most challenging aspect of completing our project because it significantly delayed our planning due to the sudden and complete shift from in-person to remote learning and working environments. Although COVID-19 forced us to reimagine how to best deliver on the intentionality behind Free Speech Week it also allowed us to magnify our reach because we now had the opportunity to engage a wider audience than may have been possible if we had been in-person (please see the infographic on page 5 for details regarding our registration numbers).

Overall, the virtual nature of Free Speech Week allowed us to maximize on the potential positive impact we could have on our campus community by facilitating our ability to end each Zoom session with tools, resources, and continued learning through our exciting book giveaway of *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson for participants. Importantly, the majority of the feedback we received was positive and taken together it suggested that we accomplished our project objectives, and that Free Speech Week was a resounding success. For examples of the breadth and depth of the positive impact of Free Speech Week on different members of our campus community, please see the select quotes on page 6. Moreover, [the availability on our events website of the recorded Free Speech Week sessions](#)—as future resources for anyone interested—helps ensure that the potential impact of our project extends beyond the conclusion of our events.

Designing and implementing UC Merced's inaugural Free Speech Week as a 2019-2020 VOICE awardee was a very exciting and rewarding process. Although the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement did a great job of supporting our efforts, they might consider co-developing a social media marketing plan with awardees in future years to help maximize the visibility of their work.



For more information about UC Merced's inaugural Free Speech Week,
email diversity@ucmerced.edu or visit
<https://diversity.ucmerced.edu/events/free-speech-week>